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C O N F I D E N T I A L DOHA 000475

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/01/2018

TAGS: PGOV ECON OA

SUBJECT: QATAR CABINET SHUFFLE ANNOUNCED

Classified By: CDA Michael A. Ratney, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Characterized by local press reports as the "broadest and most sweeping" cabinet shuffle since the Qatari Government came into existence, Amir Hamad bin Khalifah Al Thani, accompanied by Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ), appointed and swore in several new ministers July 1. The most prominent new appointments include Sheikh Fahd bin Jassim Al Thani (Chief Operating Office at the telephone monopoly, Q-Tel) as Minister of Business and Commerce, Dr. Hamad bin Abdulaziz Al-Kuwari (former Ambassador to the U.S. and UN) as Minister of Culture and Heritage, and Khalid bin Mohamad Al-Attiyah (Chairman of the National Human Rights Committee) as Minister of International Cooperation. In some cases, notably environmental affairs, culture and health, independent agencies are being elevated to ministries. International Cooperation, however, is an entirely new entity with responsibilities that are not yet clear.

¶2. (U) On the same day, the Amir issued a decree extending the term of the (appointed) Advisory Council (Majlis al-Shura) for two more years. This suggests that long-discussed elections for the body could be delayed for at least that long.

¶3. (U) Notable new ministers and their portfolios include:

Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs:
Ahmad Ghurab Al-Marri, replacing Faisal bin Abdullah Al-Mahmoud

Minister of Public Health:
Dr. Sheikha Ghaliyah bint Mohamad Al Thani, currently head of the National Health Authority

Minister of Cabinet Affairs:
Nasir bin Mohamad Al Thani

Minister of Social Affairs (formally part of the Ministry of Labor):
Nasir Al-Humaidi

Minister of Environment:
Abdullah bin Barak Al-Meadadi

¶4. (U) The major cabinet luminaries, such as HBJ and Minister of Energy and Industry (and Deputy Prime Minister) Hamad bin Abdullah Al-Attiyah did not change. The Minister of Finance, Youssef Hussein Kamal, also remained in place. He will now be Minister of Finance and Economy. In the case of the health portfolio, the newly appointed minister -- Sheikha Ghaliyah Al Thani -- has been the de facto focal point for health issues for many months. The July 1 announcement merely elevates her to ministerial status.

¶5. (C) Comment: Newly named Minister for Culture and Heritage Hamad Al-Kuwari predicted to Charge in late June that a veritable "tsunami" would hit the cabinet in early July. While we do not dispute that these are significant

changes to the cabinet, our definition of a "tsunami" would have to include changes to the Foreign Affairs, Finance, and Energy portfolios -- changes that did not take place. No appointment suggests any change in the orientation of Qatar's foreign or domestic policies. The Amir remains Chairman and CEO of a family operation in which the major divisions are run by his wife (education and social development), son (security and military), long-time personal friend (energy), and family fixture (foreign affairs and investment).

RATNEY